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Strategic Studies

Considering New Approaches for the Future

Assessing strategic program issues and identifying future requirements and opportunities for improvement are important to program management. In conjunction with Judicial Conference committees, Administrative Office staff directed studies by independent consultants or undertook studies of several major program areas in 2000.

Space and Facilities. In May 2000, the Judiciary received a final report from Ernst & Young following a year-long independent assessment of the Judiciary's space and facilities program. The contractors recognized that the Judiciary already has taken

steps to achieve savings and made suggestions and recommendations for further efficiencies in the use of the Judiciary's space and facilities.

Judicial Security. An independent assessment of the Judiciary's security program was begun in February 2000 to review the effectiveness and efficiency of current security standards, policies, and procedures. A final report with recommendations for physical security of courthouses, the feasibility of replacing contract court security officers with a federal security force, and records checks for court employees is due in early 2001.

Independent Study of the Space and Facilities Program

Principal findings and conclusions from the study include the following:

- **Planning.** The consultants concluded that the Judiciary's long-range facilities planning process has produced reasonably accurate predictions of judges, staff, and associated facilities needs. They recommended several refinements to the planning process.
- **Courtrooms.** Ernst & Young found that new courtroom policies adopted in 1997, particularly regarding the provision of courtrooms to senior judges for 10 years, resulted in a reduction in the number of courtrooms planned for new facilities—with an average of four courtrooms planned for every five judges. Ernst & Young identified important factors that necessitate a high degree of flexibility in the scheduling and use of courtrooms, and, consequently, limit the ability to share courtrooms. Ernst & Young recommended 1) retaining the national policy of planning one courtroom per active Article III judge, 2) on a case-by-case basis, considering whether fewer courtrooms may be feasible in courthouses with more than 10 district judges, and 3) for senior district judges, providing access to a dedicated courtroom for the first two years and, thereafter, one courtroom for every two working senior judges.
- **Funding Courthouses.** Ernst & Young recommended alternative funding approaches that would give the Judiciary more direct control.
- **Design and Construction of Facilities.** Ernst & Young found that the *U.S. Courts Design Guide* is a useful document and recommended some further cost-control options and the development of separate standards for renovation projects. Ernst & Young concluded that the cost benchmarks and escalation rates used by the General Services Administration (GSA) are outdated, and noted that GSA's plans for public spaces in courthouses can constitute a significant part of the overall cost.



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Information Technology. An independent contractor examined the Judiciary's information technology needs and objectives, considering anticipated changes and enhancements in technology in the marketplace. A final report was received in November 2000, and the contractor concluded that the Judiciary has been able to put in place a national information technology program with significantly fewer resources than other government organizations, especially considering its complex information environment and highly distributed operations. The report recommends ways the Judiciary can take advantage of new technologies to meet its future operational requirements.

National Training Needs. A contractor analyzed, documented, and prioritized training needs and prepared a training plan for the development of future training programs.

Bankruptcy Mega-Cases. Administrative Office and Federal Judicial Center staff studied the weighted caseload formula to determine the adjustment needed to reflect more accurately the judicial workload implications of mega-case chapter 11 filings.

Lawbooks and Libraries. The study is reviewing alternatives related to lawbooks, defining core collections for libraries and judges' chambers, and examining size guidelines for libraries. Consultants surveyed judges, law clerks, staff attorneys, and pro se law clerks on the use of lawbooks and libraries. Survey

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results, along with spending, inventory, and other data will be used to develop a report that will be discussed by the Committee on Automation and Technology at its June 2001 meeting.

Postage and Mail Management. Consultants reviewed the Judiciary's mail management practices and concluded that there were no major cost inefficiencies and that court mail units are using prudent judgment in their mail operations. As a result of a pilot project, conversion of all courts to commercial postage accounts will begin in fiscal

year 2001, upon approval of Director Mecham.

Probation and Pretrial Services System. The purpose of the study is to make recommendations for ensuring the future quality and success of the probation and pretrial services system. Consultants will identify strategic issues; define core functions and work; identify resources; suggest ways to enhance effectiveness or efficiency; and assess alternative approaches for program services.

Communications

Disseminating Information About the Judiciary

An important part of the work of Administrative Office staff is communicating effectively with federal courts and the public. Agency employees use electronic and paper methods of communicating to distribute information and reach out to Judiciary employees, the public, and Congress.

at 34 court locations across the country participated in a Law Day program sponsored by the Administrative Office. The program, Judicial Independence and You, won an Outstanding Law Day Activity Award from the American Bar Association.

Another initiative is the Outreach to Colleges and Universities project. Targeted at college and law-school graduates, a CD-ROM was developed for universities and placement offices, which provides information about the wide variety of career opportunities within the Judiciary. This initiative will enable the Judiciary to compete with the private sector and other federal agencies for quality talent in the current competitive job market.

Internet. The Administrative Office manages and coordinates policy and procedures related to Internet access and maintains its own Internet site, www.uscourts.gov. A new feature of this site is Judiciary Now, which is used to bring the latest news to the media and the public. Many courts make information available to the public via the Internet. As a result, they receive fewer calls regarding

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Community Outreach. Community outreach programs increase the public's understanding of the federal Judiciary. This year, more than 1,300 high-school seniors